

County Council Action Guide, Volume 1:

Distributing Information, Building Participation, and Providing Education

The following guidelines are presented to assist County Agricultural Development Councils in the development of their County Comprehensive Plans. These steps provide ways that councils can work to enhance opportunities for agricultural economic development on a county, multi-county and regional basis. This process provides an opportunity for agriculture to assume a leadership role in planning the future of communities in the Commonwealth.

All councils should remember that they should not take on the task at hand on your own. Your job is too big for an 8-member council to have the time, energy or expertise necessary to complete it successfully. Reach out to others in the community who have a vested interest in a healthy agricultural economy, take the lead in initiating a community development planning process, and utilize all resources available to you.

AVAILABLE RESOURCES

- The County Cooperative Extension Service has the duty of administrator of the County Agricultural Development Councils.
- The State Agricultural Development Board will provide fact sheets, camera-ready flyers, and other standardized information to County Councils.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Provide Information and Facilitate Participation

Provide information to your community regarding the agricultural development council. Build the interest of community members in the initial phase of your agricultural development plan by explaining the purpose of the legislation, what's at stake, and how they should be prepared to participate. Reach out and bring community members into the planning process.

- Utilize standard material from State Agricultural Development Board public information campaign
- **Distribute printed material** to churches, governmental offices, schools, groceries, community civic organizations, and other points where people gather.
- **Introduce the County Agricultural Development Council** to the community and explain their role through meetings of community organizations, community events, and community media outlets.
- **Call a series (at least 2) of informal, well-publicized community meetings** that explain the purpose of HB 611, generate general

discussion about the future of agriculture in your community, and create opportunities for involvement in developing the County Agricultural Development Plan

- **Strategically identify persons who work in fields other than agriculture** but have a vested interest in a healthy agricultural economy and request their assistance and collaboration in developing the County Agricultural Development Plan. Some examples include banking and finance officials, local government officials, local economic development officials, local school officials, health care representatives, social service agency personnel, community education personnel, etc.

SUGGESTED DATE OF COMPLETION: September 22, 2000

2. Initiate a process of community education on agriculture's contribution to local quality of life

Educate the community about the role of farming in the local economy to strengthen the relationship between community residents and area farmers.

- **Host a discussion of how local economies work**, consulting with local economic development officials, state economic development data, Cooperative Extension and other individuals identified in Step 1. Encourage dialogue about how farms fit into the local economy and how the local economy is reliant on farms. Include discussion of how farming benefits the local natural environment and takes advantage of local natural resources.
- **Develop articles about farming and the local economy** and the advantages of supporting local agriculture in local media
- **Inventory and evaluate what types of food and supplies your community imports** for school systems, prisons, universities, state parks, and other potential markets
- **Explore efforts of other counties and other states** through information exchanges or joint meetings.

NOTE: Some of these items can be accomplished concurrently with items in Step 1. For example, information about farming and the local economy could be provided in a newspaper profile of your Council members. The inventory of imported farm products can be developed while other items are being addressed.